



NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF THE STATE'S ATTORNEY FOR HOWARD COUNTY

For Immediate Release:

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Columbia Man sentenced to Prison in Extortion Attempt on Businessman

A Columbia man, who tried to extort \$200,000 from a Howard County businessman, who was his childhood friend, has been sentenced to three years in prison. Raul Pina-Ruiz, 56, of the 6100 block of Orient Lane was sentenced in Howard County Circuit Court this morning after pleading guilty to a single count of extortion last October. Pina-Ruiz posted \$100,000 bond when he was initially arrested in 2010 but disappeared to Mexico until April 2017 when he returned to the United States and was arrested in Charlotte, N.C.

At the October plea hearing, Deputy State's Attorney Kim Y. Oldham told the court that in February 2010, Pina-Ruiz made anonymous phone calls to the businessman, threatening to kill his family unless the victim agreed to give Pina-Ruiz \$200,000 cash. Oldham stated that Pina-Ruiz implied that he was associated with the notorious violent Mexican drug cartel, Los Zetas. Pina-Ruiz was "caught in the act" on February 17, 2010 retrieving a bag of what he thought was cash at a drop location behind the Columbia Food Lion in Oakland Mills. Pina-Ruiz was arrested by undercover Howard County police detectives who had traced the phone calls, identified Pina-Ruiz, and staked-out the drop location.

"Knowing the fear the victim has experienced for years, along with the allegation of the drug connections, the state is asking for a sentence above the sentencing guidelines," stated Oldham at this morning's sentencing hearing. Pina-Ruiz's defense attorney stated that his client was a citizen, a classic successful immigrant success story and that the incident was "a shocking departure." Pina-Ruiz told the court, "I am very regretful and ashamed of what I did to [the victim's] family."

Judge Timothy J. McCrone characterized Pina-Ruiz's actions as "despicable and worrisome," sentencing Pina-Ruiz to 10 years in prison, suspending all but three years. Upon release, Pina-Ruiz faces five years of supervised probation.

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